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NEW POLICY AIMS AT USES OF FOREST RESIDUE

Forest residue is worth money. That's the message from Jeff Sirmon, Regional Forester for the Pacific Northwest Region of the USDA Forest Service.

Historically, forest management has taken the easy road by getting merchantable logs out of the woods and burning whatever was left. But a new policy statement by Sirmon declares that "all woody biomass residue must be considered a resource. Utilization of the residues will be the rule," he said.

Sirmon has directed that each National Forest in Oregon and Washington develop a forest residue management program to assure that residue will be used to enhance its highest possible value. "The Region depends upon the forest industry to develop markets for under-utilizing species, sizes and grades," Sirmon said. "The new policy directs Forest Supervisors to take a more active role in marketing."

Some residue must be left at the site to provide wildlife cover or to decompose for soil nutrient cycling. All other possible uses for the residue must be evaluated before any decision is made to burn the remaining material. Commercial values such as firewood, pulpwood, and hogfuel are important long-standing uses, but research and commercial ingenuity have developed a variety of other uses for this material.

(more)

(New Policy-2-2-2)

"This policy reflects the Forest Service's desire to utilize more of the forest resources for the public good and to reduce the amount of smoke put into the air," Sermon added.

"All possibilities must be considered prior to any decision to burn the material," Sirmon said, "and our management program must recognize that potential market developers should be able to plan on a predictable residue supply over a relatively long period of time." Each National Forest will determine the dry tons of residue that can be made available and will establish periodic inventories of available forest residue.

According to Sirmon, the prevalence of "conk rot" in Douglas-fir often created residues requiring extensive burning. But enterprising purchasers in the 1950's found ways to utilize defective Douglas-fir "cull peelers" for plywood.

Another forest residue utilization development has been cogeneration (electricity production). Forest millend residues are used to generate electric power at many mills. Surplus energy is sold to and distributed by utilities. Sirmon points out that some 700,000 acres of lodgepole pine growing in Oregon between Bend and Klamath Falls is seriously impacted by mountain pine beetle. The dead and dying trees in these forests could be used to generate electricity while making room for a new healthy forest.

"An excess of electric energy in the Pacific Northwest possibly puts cogeneration on hold for now," Sirmon said, "but economic development in the region can well turn excess into shortage. I'm convinced forest residues can become a valuable resource and supply fuel as well as raw material for many other forest products."

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